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NOTES
AND
OBSERVATIONS
ON
THE EARLY PART OF THE HISTORY
OF THE
BRITISH ISLES.

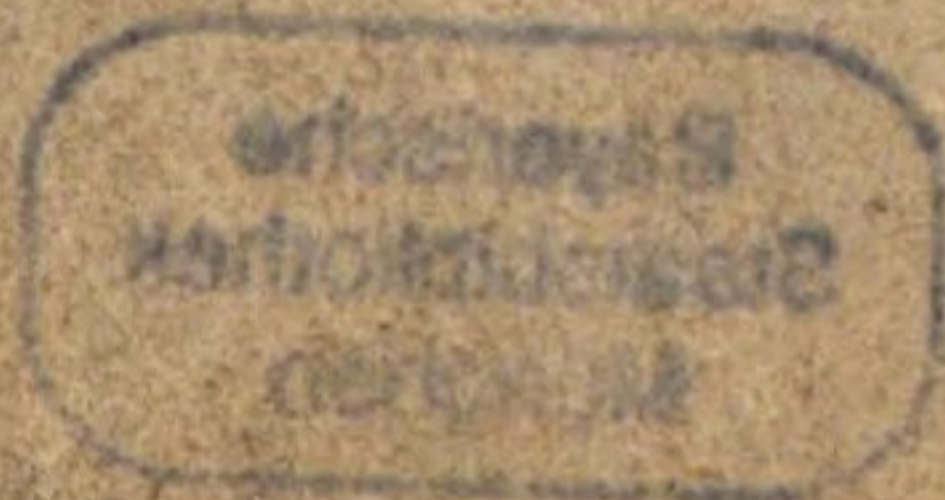
BY
ROBERT COUPER, M.D. F.R.S. ED.

—“Semper aliquid ad communem utilitatem debemus afferre.”

CICERO

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INTRODUCTION.

ALTHOUGH it is, very properly, an established rule, that no publication, as a thing of deliberation and of time, ought to be permitted to come forward with an apology on its front, yet it will sometimes necessarily happen; and we must, as usual, suffer the exception, with the little subtlety necessary to accommodate the idea, to establish the rule.

The course of reading which introduced the following ideas and opinions, was merely accidental; and it was followed up so far, more from curiosity in general, than from any purpose directly in view. These notes, then, though not inconsiderately adopted, from the careless manner in which they are thrown together, and committed to paper, the reader will very readily observe, were not intended for publication. Indeed some of the first and leading ones were offered to a friend much engaged in these pursuits; but having reason to believe those communicated did not entirely suit his purpose, and almost accidentally persevering in the
same

same course of reading, the Notes accumulated even beyond the present publication. They are then thrown before the public in this crude state, in the idea, that though they were not likely to be useful to the author in his own pursuits, they might be useful when combined with other pursuits, and in the hands of others; and he flatters himself, that this specimen may excite a similar and farther exertion.

Etymological deductions, no doubt, have been often strained, and often deceiving; but to hold them up to such general severity of censure as some have done, is not reconcilable either to learning or common sense: And in the following sheets, the author can safely aver, that the opinions arose from the etymologies, and that the etymologies were not forced and wire-drawn to support the opinions.

Valeant quod valere possint.

NOTES

NOTES

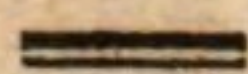
ON THE

EARLY HISTORY OF SCOTLAND.

IT may appear very superfluous to some, at this time of day, to be raking up the earliest periods of our history, when scientific men of abundant diligence, and unquestionable abilities, have thrown all the light upon the subject which they could, and perhaps as much as it deserves. There is, however, something pleasing to most, in these enquiries, especially if our own country is concerned; and though a new continent may not be discovered, or the principles of government in an ancient

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empire



empire unfolded, we are disposed to be wondrously satisfied with much inferior lucubrations; and a slight ray of additional light, thrown upon the early and leading points of our own history, affords us no slight gratification: It is like the undecaying attractions of our own native spot of earth. We may traverse the globe; wealth may be poured down upon us; all the beauties of nature and art may be within our reach: but set us down by the fireside of our early days; let us recognise, on every hillock, and by every brook, the scenes of our little, but well remembered, achievements; and the gaudiest and the proudest of our days will sink before them.

As far back as tradition or record bear us, the Celtæ, however descended, or whence originating, covered the greatest part of the inhabited world. From Gibraltar

raltar and the Baltic, to the Caspian, and how much farther east and south we know not, the Celtic was the general and prevailing language. Hence it is more probable that Scythia, whence most authors are disposed to bring those people, was a district of the Celts, than that the Celts were Scythians. The name of Celtæ, or Celts, seems not to have been communicated to that people from the name of any country they might have been derived from, or in which at any time they might have been settled. In this, as well as in many other things, the whole people, and the divided tribes, seem to have differed very materially, the whole people continuing to call themselves, or to be called, Celtæ, while the tribes, or colonies, assumed names entirely new, as Scatti; or to the new name affixed the general one, as Celtiberians. As all their names are descriptive, and generally throw some



light on ancient times, we shall look into the last of these at present; the first one will appear afterwards more in its place. Celtiberia, then, signifies the Celts of Ibh-her, or, as it is latinized, Iberia; Ibh in the Celtic language, signifying a Country, and Err, bounding, limiting, terminating.—Hence, before the arrival of the Romans, the little that was known of Spain, from the Pyrenees along the east, only to Gibraltar, was called Ibherr, and its inhabitants Celtibherr. The name of Gibraltar, itself, is Celtic at this day. Gibbach, rough; er, terminating; al, a rock; and ter, the earth—the rough terminating rock of the earth, which suits perfectly not only with the place, but with the geographical ideas of the times; and so is also the old name Calpe, and nearly signifying the same thing. Call, or Gall, signifies a rock; and Biodh, or Piodh, both sounded nearly Bee or Pee, the world—the

the rock of the world, from its magnitude, or its being their boundary of the world ; or, rather, from Gall, a rock, and Bagh, or Badh, pronounced nearly as our word bay, and the origin of it, the Bay of the Rock. From the names of the tribes, or colonies, acquiring the ascendancy, the general name began to dwindle away ; and the very name of Celt, when the language began to be corrupted, first by the Romans, and afterwards by the Goths and Vandals, was soon almost sunk to the very people who had at first assumed it, or upon whom it was at first imposed. — The Gael of the present day are said to be fond of etymology, or strained derivations. We, surely, have very little reason to complain of this ; for Buchanan, as we will afterwards see, scarcely acknowledges any acquaintance with that language, though it was his mother-tongue ; and other men of the same country, in later times,

times, and certainly masters of the language, have made a slight and as unprofitable an use of it. It is surely very remarkable, that the very name of this immense people, either in ancient or modern times, has never, as far as I know, caught the eye of the curious. As I have said, whether the name of the Celts was assumed, or imposed, it is singularly expressive: Indeed this language, in general, is allowed to be so. Ge, or Ce, signifies the earth; and Oilt, terror; Ge-oilt, or Ce-oilt, the terror or scourge of the earth. This name applies most remarkably to this people, whether assumed by their vanity, for which they were celebrated, or imposed upon them by the rest of mankind; for, among all antiquity; they were most addicted to war, and the most ferocious. It may be necessary to add, that in the pronunciation of the G and the C by the Celts, and in the Erse
and

and Irish of the present times, they are both sounded hard, and nearly similarly; and the E open is sounded like the diphthong æ, and each of them, somewhat like the ay in English, in the words day, way, pay. Hence, imperceptibly, we find ourselves possessed of the distinguishing name of that people from the most ancient to the most modern times, without alteration; the Ceoilt and the Gaoild, the d and the t, being also similar, and almost lost in both. Let us not slight these notices; they throw not a little light about them, and, in better hands, might throw a great deal more.

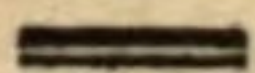
When Julius Cæsar landed upon our isle, and from whence our public existence may be dated, he found it settled in no new order, by numerous, powerful, and warlike tribes of that independent people. The name of the whole island seems

seems to have been Albion; the southern division of it, from the isthmus of the Clyde and Forth to Cornwall, which seems to have been peopled a considerable time prior to that behind the isthmus, was called Britain. It has been said, that these names were imposed by foreigners, therefore we are to look into other languages for their interpretation; and they feel strengthened in this supposition, in finding the general names used by the natives sometimes different. But what foreigners were connected with them, who spoke a different language? Even the Phenicians, who seem to be the first upon record to whom our island was known, and who trafficked with it even before the Trojan war, were believed to be Celts; and the scenes in their language in Plautus is perfectly intelligible Celtic at this very day. From the nature of the Celtic language, where one word, little varied, has many interpretations,

interpretations, we have a large but a doubtful etymology ; and this is farther extended by difference of dialects, and the language not being a written language.— Thus, Albion may be Alb, or Alp, high ; I, an island ; and On, or Onn, spotted, stony, furzy, or trading—the high variegated, or, &c. island ; or, if the io is sounded as ee, or the Scottish i, the Gaelic mode at this day, it will be Alb-high, and In, a country or island—the high country, or high island. Britain, or Britan, scarcely differs in its etymology ; and even if we bring its first settlers from Brittany, which seems highly probable, and their name of Britons also from that country, the one springing from the other, as usual, along with them, we will not find it affected. Armorica, another name for this country on the continent, seems rather applicable to a part of it, that part along the coast, as the name Armorica, or

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Armoreca,



Armoreda, in Celtic, signifies along the sea. The name of Britannia seems, at first, to have been given by foreigners to the whole island; and to its inhabitants, Britanni. Afterwards it seems to have been limited to the country within the Roman pale, and Britones, the old name of the people resumed; the people themselves all the while maintaining their old general name of Cumri, with their old divisional names.

Thus, by our earliest accounts, we find Britain was settled as far north as the Æstuaries of the Clyde and Forth; behind these the country was unoccupied. The general name of the people was Britons, a nation of the Celtæ; and it is of little consequence whether they came from Iberia, Armorica, or the shores of the Caspian; and their language was a dialect of the Celtic, as was that of all the tribes, on the
arrival

arrival of the Romans, when the island was completely occupied. I mention this of the languages here, for two reasons.—The venerable Bede has been said to have misrepresented the early language of the island, when it was fully peopled, and to have laid the foundation of much doubt and controversy in our history, by advancing that five different languages were spoken in it; whereas the pious old man only says, rejoicing, that in his day, by means of the Latin tongue, known to them all, the five different nations of the island, the Angli, Britones, Scotti, Picti, and Latini, had been made acquainted with the truths of the Christian religion. The other reason, also, arising from Bede, is brought in, perhaps, as much from its singular curiosity, as from its proof of the uniformity of the language of the island after it was fully settled. The same respectable person, Bede, speaks of the town

of Guidi, situated about the middle of the eastern *Æstuary*. A town in these days, as in America, and many other places, even at the present time, comprehended many miles of country around; and this gives room for the disputed locality of this town, some placing it at Stirling, and others at the junction of the Roman wall with the Forth. This *Æstuary* we have found no name to in our annals, though it has not escaped the diligence of the authors of Rome. It is called *Bodotria*, and *Boderia* by Tacitus and Pliny—a shibboleth to our Antiquarians: And here I cannot help observing, that Buchanan, whose mother-tongue was the Gaelic, and who, from this, could have thrown much light on our early history, has been as sparing of it as if he had been ashamed of it; and we cannot think that twenty or twenty-five years absence from his native country could have effaced his native language. —

The

The Roman authors have very slightly latinized the name of this Æstuary. Bodo-
tria, with very feeble etymological com-
pulsion, runs itself into Bogh, crooked or
winding; and Dothar, sinking the h, a
river—a winding river; and Bogh, as be-
fore, and Deire, all the letters sounded, the
deep—Boghdeire, the winding deep.—
Either of these describe the Forth, espe-
cially if in reference to the town or dis-
trict of Guidi, where Edinburgh now
stands. Gaoth, in the Celtic, where the
ao is sounded as the Greek upsilon, and
the h not sounded at all, becomes Guit, or
Guid—t and d being mutual in that lan-
guage, and signifies the water; and if an
appropriate termination is given to it, as
seems to be attempted in the Latin of
Bede, it may emphatically mean the town
or people by the water, which divided the
two great people of the island. On this
idea only can we account for the Britons
being



being called Guidbhean by the Scotti.— Guidbhean thus may signify the town by the waters on the hill; and by the Scotti may have been used in a more extended sense, and applied to the nation in general—as we say, Roman, from the city of Rome, instead of Italian. This idea is strangely countenanced by the story of Guiderius in Shakespeare's Cymbeline. Guiderius, from his name, was evidently prince, or chief, of this country, or township, of which we are treating; and when he changes his more latinized British name, it is only thrown into other words of the same Celtic language—Palladour, or Belladour, the people, or township, by the water. The modern name of Edinburgh, which, also, has occasioned so many difficulties; seems merely a translation of this idea into the Anglo-Saxon.— Ea, in Saxon, is water; dinne, noisy; and burg, a town—the town by the noisy boisterous

boisterous waters. What I am next to mention may meet with a little ridicule, as a sort of travestie ; but it does not strike me as such, and really I cannot see how the phrase can be otherwise explained without a greater air of travestie.—Edinburgh has been called, as far back as we have records, the guid, or gude, town. The epithet of guid, gude, or good, however it may apply to a people, cannot apply to a town ; and if we run the word back to its mother Gaelic, or British, where it is also epithetical, we do only what is done in ten thousand places in the island. Guid, besides the meanings already affixed to it, very generally signifies windy ; and to no place can it be more applicable than Edinburgh. Let us, however, return to our more immediate purpose.

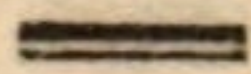
The population of the remaining part
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of the island, though seemingly of very slight consequence, has given rise to the most inveterate controversies. Had the property of the country, instead of the priority and mode of its population, been in question, the debate could not have been carried on with greater keenness or animosity. Ireland was certainly settled in the earliest times, and that long before an inhabitant was known in the northern parts of Britain at least. It was called Erin; Err, or Earr, in their language, the Celtic, signifying, bounding, limiting, terminating, and In, or Inn, an island—the limiting or extremest island, alluding to its projection into the Western Ocean beyond the British isles; for they seem always to have had a propensity to peep westward; and, therefore, there is no improbability in some of their expeditions being driven across the Atlantic in some early period. However the traditional history

history of Ireland may have overrated Ireland and its antiquities, or however national jealousy, on the other hand, may have depreciated it, from all that remains to us now, we must certainly admit, that Ireland was in a comparatively superior state to South Britain, when they were both first more generally known to other nations; and while, as I have said, the northern parts of Britain were not inhabited at all. According to the Celtic custom, the people called themselves Erinach; but they were also called Scotti.—*Hic labor, hoc opus.* The present Scots infer from this, that Ireland was peopled from the present Scotland, and carried the name along with them. This is evidently impossible; for there were Scotti in Ireland, when there was not a soul beneath the Forth. The usual derivation of Scotti, from Scuit, a wanderer from Scythia, is childish and absurd. To make it

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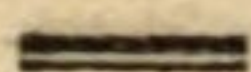
palatable



palatable at all, we are obliged to move the ancient Scythia from the heart of Asia to the shores of the British channel.— This is wandering with a vengeance! If these colonies were pressed forward, as it seems, no doubt, to have been the case, by the overflowing hordes of the north and east, and which afterwards, taking a more southerly direction, overwhelmed the strongest empires; would not the Celtic word Scaoth, pronounced Scuite also, and signifying a swarm, a multitude, apply much better? This idea seems to be countenanced by Bede, who, in speaking of the settlement of the Dalruedenes, in the northern parts of the island, adds, that thus a third nation of the Scotti, besides the Britones and the Picti, were now settled in Britain. If this interpretation is admitted, many difficulties will be removed. This island seems, anciently, to have been also called Hiberin, or Ibh, aspirated, and

and Erin, the country of Erin, from whence the Latin Hibernia is evidently derived.

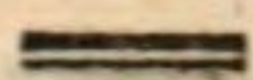
We have now given light as to the period when the Celtæ first settled in Ireland; though, from the reasons already assigned, we have good grounds to apprehend that it must have taken place earlier than that of their brethren in Britain; and both of them must have taken place very long before the appearance of the Romans on our shores. Indeed, notwithstanding many extravagancies in our early history, and all the ridicule thrown upon it, from the state the Romans found not only the south of Britain, but also the remotest and wildest of its northern districts, settled at a much later period, it seems impossible to withhold our assent to the early colonization both of Britain and Ireland, even as far back as is generally alledged,



high as their antiquities may at first sight appear ; and as probably in the manner represented to us, as in any other. Had the colonization of these islands been as recent as many authors wish to establish, what a system of absurdity and inconsistency would follow ? To talk of their settlement above a few ages prior to the Christian æra, is considered as absurd, and treated with derision ; how then are the following stubborn facts and circumstances to be reconciled to these opinions ?—Sixty years before our æra, Julius Cæsar, with his veterans, who had been irresistible on the continent, landed in Britain. The south of Britain was equal, at least, to the provinces of Gaul, and the conquest of the island more inviting to the Roman arms than the extension of their territories on any other side ; and had they been a mercantile people, an idea which, unfortunately, perhaps, for them, never entered
into

into their system, its conquest, from its mines, would have been doubly valuable; yet we find Cæsar, after several bloody conflicts, withdraw, though victorious, (as he alledges) from the island. His report of it must have been of a formidable kind; for the Romans, however greedy of conquest, thought not of it, though in the meridian of their power, for more than a century; and even then, as a proof of the consequence they held it in, their ablest emperors, or most consummate generals, were sent against it. The prudent and warlike Agricola lost his armies in the north; yet, with that Roman vanity which never forsook them, he drew a wall between the Forth and the Clyde, as if the warriors who had resisted his armies, were to be cooped in by such a barrier. Accordingly, about forty years afterwards, we find Agricola's nominal precautions so completely useless, that Adrian

was



was glad to recover what was now called the British and Roman territory, and to draw another mound between the Tyne and Solway, leaving the debateable land between the walls to their inveterate and invincible foes, the Scotti of the north.— About twenty years afterwards, Lollius Urbicus restored the debateable lands to the empire, and superadded a turf wall to that of Agricola, and with similar success: For in the next accounts, we find, about seventy years afterwards, Severus, though he had overrun all the north, in the most vindictive and sanguinary manner, and with almost the entire loss of his armies, rebuilding the wall between the Tyne and the Solway; and the debateable lands again in the hands of the Scotti, under whatever denomination. In the course of another seventy years, we find the same wall repaired by Carausius, which shews that the Scotti not only were able to maintain

tain themselves in their own territories, but to make encroachments on their powerful neighbours. Nearly a century afterwards they seem to have been driven back within their own original territories by Valentinian, who put Agricola's wall again in a state of defence. A few years afterwards it was repaired by Stilicho, the last arm of the Roman greatness and fortunes; and the Roman armies were withdrawn from the island. With double fury the Scotti now broke through these unavailing ramparts; and the Britons, thus driven to despair, had recourse for assistance to their old oppressors the Romans. The Scotti were again driven within their ancient boundaries; the two walls were repaired; and the Roman armies left Britain for ever. It is needless for our present purpose to pursue this idea any farther; only let me observe, that it presents another, noways acceptable either



ther to our national pride, or to our private feelings. The Britons, in their adversities, in the earliest times, never seem to have had confidence in themselves; the Celtic spirit seems to have declined in the humid regions of the south of Britain, and hence the different conquests of that part of the island. The same system, and, consequently, the same inefficient spirit, seem to continue to this day; and if we are not inviting armies within us to subdue us again, we are subsisting armies without, perhaps hostile to our interests, at least careless to our enterprizes. Now, after this review of the glorious and successful resistance of the Roman legions, in their proudest periods, by the Scots, the Picts, or the Caledonians, or by whatever name the colonies settled benorth the Æstuaries of the Clyde and Forth were designated, (to say nothing of their frequent and destructive wars amongst themselves)

selves) can we suppose these colonies to have sprung up like mushrooms? Can we suppose them the production of a few centuries, and in a country, too, not of the kindliest soil and climate? No.—I am afraid it will require all the length of time which the despised legends and traditions have presumed to occupy.

Though we thus can only direct ourselves, by circumstances, to the period of the colonization of the north parts of the island, we are pretty satisfactorily instructed as to the manner it was accomplished. The venerable Bede, here again, is of essential service, and evidently could have been of more, had it been in his line; and what he gives us we can rely on, though there is sometimes a carelessness in his expression, as we have already noticed, tending to confusion, and which we meet with in the very threshold. He says that

a nation of the Picti, from Scythia, were driven beyond Britain, and reached Ireland. Here he uses the distinguishing name of that nation, or tribe, of the Scotti, as used in his own time; not adverting, that though that people had been settled for many centuries in Britain, they had never been generally known by the name of Picti, till near the end of the third century of our æra. I shall afterwards shew the rise and progress of that name, and very differently from its common acceptance. Bede goes on to say, that Ireland was then so fully settled by the Scotti, that they had no room for this new colony; wherefore they advised them to pass over to the northern parts of Britain, offering them assistance to effectuate a settlement there, if they required it. The new colony, whether from choice or compulsion, sailed up the Firth of Clyde; at the head of which they found the Britons
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in such force, that they were obliged to accept from them the territories behind the Forth and Clyde, which, till then, seem not to have been inhabited. This colony of Scotti, no doubt augmented by followers from Ireland, (for an intercourse evidently subsisted between them) perhaps joined by some of the Britons, and perhaps by new colonies from the continent, seem to have soon filled the country allotted to them; and though still under the general name of Scotti, their ancient title, (or of Calidones, a comparatively new one given to them from the appearance of the country which they now inhabited,) they seem to have divided themselves, under more appropriate Gaelic names, into inhabitants of the mountainous, and of the low countries. As usual in all societies, rude or civilized, quarrels and wars broke out; no doubt accelerated, and more inveterate, from the division of the people.



The tribes of the mountains seem to have suffered under the more powerful, and, probably, more numerous, tribes of the low country; and a number of them, with their chiefs, from their restless and ambitious enterprizes, seem to have been driven out of their country. From their connection and intercourse with Ireland, they withdrew to that island, and some of them to the continent, determined to return with additional force, and to recover and maintain their former establishments. Accordingly they landed again in their own country; and the Scotti of the low countries, exhausted by the wars which had driven out their brethren of the mountains, and who, in their debilitated state, had been harrassed by the Britons, gladly received them, and restored to them the possession of their former establishments in the western mountains, from Dumbarton northwards. Riuda was the
name

name of the chief who had been expelled from Scotland, and under whom this new expedition and re-settlement had been effected. After this, the country where this almost new colony of Scotti was established, was called Dalriuda, or Dalriada, and the people Dalriudini, or Dalreadini, both bearing the same interpretation. Now, in the Celtic, Dalriuda explains much more than has been adverted to ; Dal-ri-uda signifying the country of the jealous and despairing Prince, which accords with the fragments of the Scottish history of these days ; and according to which fragments, these things must have happened, at least two hundred years before the Christian æra. My reasons for the credibility of these things I have already given.

It must have been about this time the Fion existed, and recommended themselves, by their manners, and their achievements,

chievements, to history. Some, indeed, seem disposed to treat their existence with dubiety, and their high claims with misbelief. Ignorance and arrogance very generally travel together; but I hope what we have said, and what yet remains for us to say, will establish that people, though their existence is rather in a sort of fabulous and heroic times. The first colony of the Scotti, who only touched at Ireland on their migration from the continent, (and which, by the way, must afford huge comfort to those who feel themselves depreciated in their ancestors spending a few years, or even centuries, in Ireland); this colony would, no doubt, take possession of the best lands which the Britons allowed to it; and the situation of their metropolis, settled then, or afterwards, establishes this idea. But the whole country, no doubt, exclusive of the most mountainous parts, (much of which will not
now

now bear a tree by any management) was covered, as is evident at this day, with the thickest woods; hence this colony would, naturally, renew their hunting state, for it is not probable they had advanced farther; and they seem to have continued in it till about the time of the return of the Dalruidini. The progress of this colony towards the agricultural state, in the intermediate, and, comparatively, quiet time, and that of the Dalruidini after their return towards the shepherd state, according to the general progress of things, would gradually diminish, and finally abolish the ideas and manners of the heroic times. Had these heroic times, and their poetical histories, taken place earlier than we are alluding to, they would have been lost in the general havoc of the times; and had they been recorded of a later period, general history, and the progress of manners, must have satisfactorily contradicted them, or rendered

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ed them incredible. Though I feel the Celt prevailing much within me, and disposed to give all possible credit to the early part of our history, yet I am far from believing, much less asserting, that all the Gaelic poetry, and the faith assumed by it, which has been published as of high antiquity and authority, is really so; but I also believe that some of this poetry, and all the manners recorded as far as they go, belong to the period we are alluding to; and that we have exceedingly to lament that the greater part of it, even in the ordinary course of things, is finally lost. It is well known that the Celts, at all times, and in every country, were not only fond of poetry, but addicted to it; and as it was to the memory alone that their history, their religion, and every thing worthy of record, was allowed to be trusted, all was committed to verse, in order to fix it deeper in the mind, and to facilitate its remembrance.

brance. It is well known, too, though seemingly paradoxical, that the poetry of the Celts was chiefly of the tender and pathetic kind, notwithstanding the unceasing wars it had to record: For the ferocity ascribed to that people in ancient times, and by people not much more civilized than themselves, was not that savage and cruel fierceness associated with that idea in modern times, but a fruitful and an unyielding mind, accompanied by strong bodily powers, which, by perseverance, and by their vehemence, bore down all resistance; and hence the polish of their manners, so prominent in the fragments of Ossian, as well as the tenderness of his poetry, are neither inconsistent nor improbable. If we consider Ireland as a boundary to the migrations of the Celts on that side, and thus becoming as a cradle to them in their new and stationary modes of life, and that the Scotti of

the north of Scotland, and those of their parent island, maintained all their early connections, we will find no period so feasible for the wars and poems of Ossian, as about the commencement of the Christian æra. The Scotti of the whole country seem not yet to have divided themselves into the Gael of the mountainous country, and the Gael of the low countries, or Pichti Labourers, or Cruithneachd Corn-Eaters, as they were called afterwards: For tradition, and the names of places at this day, testify, that the Fion had residences both in the low and high countries; and if the agricultural state had been then commenced, Ossian must have taken notice of it. We talk idly and proudly of the impossibility of such a people composing such poetry at this or any other period. Why are the Celts of Ireland and Scotland to be supposed inferior in mental powers, (in corporeal ones they leave
no

no doubt,) to the Celts of all other countries? Besides, if we accept not this as the fittest period for the poems of Ossian, I fear we will find every other one more inadequate; and if we duly consider the one generally allotted to them by the malicious and trifling cavillers at Ossian, we will find it the most improbable and unfeasible one they could have pitched upon, from the day the Scotti landed at Dumbarton, till the day James Macpherson drew his pen and his scissars at Ruthven of Badenoch. Thus, at the same time, we remove a difficulty conjured up against our venerable bard, and throw no inconsiderable light on our early history. As tending to the same purposes, we shall review another circumstance. Though I would say that this is the fittest and most probable æra of the poetry of Ossian, and thereby almost coincide with his translator; yet I am far from going every length

with him, notwithstanding all that we owe him. It has struck him that Ossian nowhere alludes to the religion of his country. There is reason to believe that the religion of the Druids was not allowed to mingle in every thing; hence the poetry of Ossian, as not connected with religious matters, might have been deprived of that machinery. Ossian evidently shews he was not destitute of what are called religious ideas, though, as we have his poems, they are few, and common to all, and that he was not ignorant of the religious ideas of other nations. His translator, as he first called himself, and his master, as he wished afterwards to be called, affects to account for this in a very singular manner. The substance of what he says is, that the influence of the Druids, in policy and war, as well as by religion, thwarted the ambitious schemes of the Fions; their destruction then, and that of their religion,

gion, became absolutely necessary, and in the event was accomplished; and hence the religion of the Druids is not introduced into the poems of Ossian. This is a feeble story; for we have reason to believe that the religion of the Druids continued in vigour long after the time Macpherson assigned to his Fions. Farther, the Fions, in all their glory, never could have been considered but as powerful and spirited chieftains, not as princes or kings; hence their arms never could have reached all the Druids, sheltered not only in the strengths of a most ancient religion, but protected, no doubt, by every other tribe, or clan, jealous of the growing and overbearing fortunes of the Fions; neither could a religion, (however absurd now,) taken in with the parents milk, and fostered with every ingenuity of priestcraft, be so speedily overturned, and its tenets eradicated in the minds of an intelligent people.

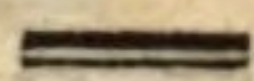
people. The loss of what part of the Druidical system Ossian could, as a bard, (an inferior order of priesthood, according to their rules) interweave into his poetry, and which, no doubt, he did, is much easier and much more satisfactorily accounted for, than by what our arch-translator has thought good to throw in our way. A much better account of it was before him; but I fear it did not entirely suit with his plans. If two sectaries of the same religion are nowise scrupulous about the means of convincing each other, what will it be between what is called two religions? The Romans, though tender of the manners and customs of the nations they had subdued, or wished to subdue; seemed noways well affected to the Druids, and accordingly that order soon began to decay in the south of Britain. In proportion in Ireland and Scotland it gathered vigour; but it was only to decline under

der the more powerful star, and the more benignant doctrine, however sullied, of the Christian code. The actors in these scenes, accordingly, were not always in unison with the doctrines they were appointed to establish, and were very far from trusting to them; and provided they obtained their end, they were little solicitous about the means they used.— Hence the destruction of the best spirits of the people never stood in their way; and if they could bring forward the best of principles, mechanized to their secular purposes, they cared not though ages of darkness and of havock to the best rights and interests of mankind, was the gloomy consequence. Hence, in its progress thro' the countries under our view, we have the best authorities for our belief, that not only a hard hand was laid on the Druidical priesthood, but the rehearsal of Celtic poetry, as it related to religion, was interdicted;

dicted; and the warlike records themselves, as not only abstracting the mind from the new doctrines, but keeping the embers of the old one alive, were passed through the furnace. In process of time, the chasms, formerly so dignifiedly filled up by Druidical machinery, and pompous descriptions of the fields of fame, would feel the torpid hand of the new order of things; and the unheard-of saint, and his childish and unmeaning miracles and fables, would miserably fill up their place. Under such hands, how little of the original Celtic poetry must remain? And the eye must be very discriminating which could detect it all; and let me add, the superior genius of Macpherson, with the burden of all his sins green on his back, has now rendered that detection impossible. While it has fared thus with the Celtic bards and their poetry, the Rhapsodists of Greece, by no means of a superior

rior order, but under more fortunate auspices, have been able to leave such traits behind them, as immortalize antiquity, and terrify the genius of modern times.— It would almost appear, that very civilized times are not friendly to the muses. Perhaps, though the spirit of poetry might arise, it might be borne down by the many shackles prepared for it, and by the jealous and coldrife opinions of the world.

Though not strictly in my way, I cannot help stopping a little here. Mr. Macpherson, after seeing and encountering this encroachment on the Celtic poetry and annals, by the progress of the Christian religion in his country, (though, for very evident reasons, he has not chosen to take notice of it,) must have assumed a double portion of his hardihood, when the weeds he was tossing away, and the very ideas he had strangled, in his representa-



tion of his own country, in order to facilitate his Scottish hypothesis, are thrust into the mouths of Irish bards and Senachies. There, as I have said, we hear nothing of the effects of the new priesthood on the Celtic life: but when he looks at Ireland, in the very same period of time, he says, their traditions and their poetry were corrupted; they were a late and a declining people, and never possessing the genuine Celtic history of themselves, or worthy of it, they had built up, in their narratives, one gross system of historical, warlike, and religious foible; and their poetry, by the same means, was one mass of affected splendour, weakness, and absurdity.

As very fully supporting what I have said, I must here introduce the following story. It is well known in Badenoch by the modern Ossianists; and I doubt not
that

that it is recollected in Edinburgh, though I believe all the gentlemen from thence concerned in it are now dead.—A party of literary gentlemen from that city, on a jaunt of pleasure through the Highlands, stopped some days at the inn at Pitmain, on the opposite side of the Spey to Ruthven, formerly the residence of James Macpherson, and round which were the greatest sticklers for the plenitude of Ossian's talents and antiquity. Part of the gentlemen's plan was to satisfy themselves, as far as they could, respecting Ossian; and for this purpose they had taken care to be recommended to the most considerable and best informed gentlemen in the country. Dining one day in one of these gentlemen's houses, they requested that an old Highlander might be produced, who could repeat any of the old poems in their original, which was to be translated by one of the gentlemen as the old man went

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along;

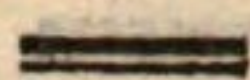
along; and every measure was taken to prevent imposition, which good manners would permit. The old man, whether he had forgot his instructions, or had more respect for his new friends and acquaintances, the saints, than he had for the chiefs of other times, whom he was disposed to consider no better than pagans, was not well got into his tale, till he had St. Patrick, St. Mungo, and the half of the calendar in full employ; and relicks and miracles crouding in upon him, to the huge consternation and dismay of the lads of the braes of Badenoch. All these, as we have said, had Macpherson to prune away, and then, I fear, his fragments were few and small; and had he left them as such, notwithstanding the elegant and masterly use he has made of them, the world would have thanked him for the glorious remains of a singular species of ancient poetry; and of a bard whose talents we are
not

not only tempted to disallow, but whose very existence we are disposed to doubt. But let us return.

The jealousy of the two people seems not, however, to have been at all diminished by the circumstances we have narrated; and as it seems about this time their governments began to assume a kind of regal form, it would gradually heighten; and the increasing differences in the modes of life between the two people, would tend to heighten it more and more. The roving hunter, and the proud warrior of the mountains, accustomed, perhaps, to the battles both of Erin and Lochlin, would soon contemn his brother of the low countries as a prisoner to his office, a tiller of the ground; while he, in his turn, would look on the man of the mountains as an idle wanderer, and of dubious life and comfort. The almost fatal consequences

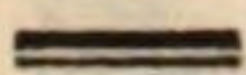
quences of their former jealousies, and the growing power of their neighbours the Britons, seem to have maintained a sort of peace between the two nations for a considerable time. During this, the Scotti of the low countries, from attaching themselves to the agricultural life, soon began, from the inferior state which agriculture must then have been in, to overflow their territories, and, as had been the custom with their forefathers, to send out colonies. It is at this time we are to look for the origin of the designation of the Picts, or Pechts, or Pechs. The northern nations, from the numerous colonies they poured forth, or the irresistible irruptions they made into other countries, were always compared to hives of bees. The same idea seems to have prevailed in Scotland at this time. The low country of the Scotti would then, from their sending out colonies, get the usual appellation of the
Hive;

Hive ; and the language of the times not only supports this idea, but, thus associated, throws a new light on the name of the Picts, hitherto so inexplicable. Let us first notice, that the bees of those days were what are called now wild bees, which had their nests in the ground, and which nests are at this day called Beaks—the ea sounded as the English bear, or pear.—Next, Beac, Beach, in the language of the times, signifies a bee ; Beachlan, a beehive ; Beacht, or Beachd, a multitude, perhaps metaphorically ; and if to either of these words we add tighe, (fear a man) perhaps understood, we come both to the meaning and pronunciation of this bone of contention. B, and p, in the Celtic, are sounded similarly ; indeed there was no p in the language till it was borrowed from the Latin. Ea, as I have said, is sounded as in the English words bear, pear ; and the ch is sounded, indeed, hard,



as the Celtic c, or English k, but, generally, as gh, in thought, brought, as strongly aspirated in the present Scottish language. Here, then, we have Peac, Peach, Peacht, Peachd, which, with the Celtic addition of tighe, tich, or ti, in the manner mentioned before, gives us the single idea of an industrious and numerous husbandry; and hence we as easily have the Pecks of the present Scots, and the Pechti, Pectich, and Picti of ancient times; and Peachtann would, in time, easily run into Peachland, or Pictland. This name seems long to have been local, and perhaps chiefly used by the Britons who had been driven back by the Scottish colonies: for it does not appear to have been extensively known, or used, till towards the end of the third century; and by their brethren the Scotti, or Gael of the mountains, it seems not, as a national name, to have been adopted at all. By these the low country of Scotland was
called

called Galldachd, and its people Galle; and as they advanced in the agricultural state, they called them Cruithneach, and their country Cruithintuath, the country of the Cruithneach. In the Celtic language, Cruithneachd signifies wheat, or perhaps victual, implying all kinds of corns, as at this day; though it is certain that, in ancient times, more wheat was paid into the monasteries than is at present raised on the same lands. The t, in all these words, is sunk. This name, evidently drawn from their mode of life, seems, like that of the Peacht by the Britons, rather to have been a kind of nickname; for that of Gall was continued, and even given to the colonies. Caithness was called Gallubh, the point of the Galls; and the tract of country between the two Roman walls, where the colonies settled, was called Galloway, no doubt from Gall and obha, the Gall beyond the rivers, to



wit, the Forth and Clyde. Thus we see the origin and intention of this name of the lowland Scotti; and the manner of its disappearance corroborates the opinion.— The pride of idle chiefs has always been able to keep neighbouring nations, however connected, in a state of jealousy or of war. This was the case of the Gael of the mountains, and the Gall of the low countries; the first still retaining, among other nations, the old name of Scotti, and the last now pretty generally known by their new name of Peachs. After many a century, and many a bloody war, the latter fell completely under the dominion of the first; their government was overturned, and their territories were united under one prince. The ancient name of the Scotti was re-applied to both, and the discriminating names of either were never more heard of. What are we to say, after this, of these antiquaries who gravely assure

assure us, that the language of the Picti is the broad Scotch of the district of Buchan, as spoken at this day; that the Celtic was never spoke south of the Forth; and a thousand such things equally founded?

This etymological deduction is very far from being forced or strained, and seems very completely to meet its purpose. I must acknowledge, however, that there is another which suits my ideas even better than this, and is perhaps more explanatory, if possible. Such an acknowledgement, in the eyes of some, may weaken both.—This, certainly, would be fastidiousness, especially considering the grounds we travel, the guides we have to follow, or the darkness we have to encounter.

I have all along presumed, that this new name, imposed upon this tribe of the Scotti, was intended as humiliating, whe-

ther originating with the Britons, from the oppression of the Scottish colonies which we have been alluding to, or from the contempt of the Gael of their own hills : for the Celtæ, at all times, held those who exercised agriculture, or trade, in the greatest abhorrence. However probable the first conjecture may be, or though both of the conjectures may have existed, and run into one another, the popular and traditionary tales, both of the high and low countries, lean to the last one, the one I am about to notice ; and the uniformity of their narratives, as well as the manner of them, notwithstanding other essential differences, is, at this day, scarcely credible ; and the pictures of the old inhabitants, barring the necessary fable, might be held up as a mirror to the present times. Indeed we see it impossible to revolutionize the mind. Modes of government, and forms of religion, with artificial

tificial manners and ceremonies, and creating the path to honour through wealth alone, will draw a veil over the human mind ; but they will not grind down one sharp point in its roughnesses. Hence, in the disastrous events on the continent for years past, the Gaul of the present day is as distinct and prominent on the canvas, as he was when he came out of the hands of Cæsar and Tacitus. This is a melancholy truth, and difficult of explanation : but though the subject be alluring, and we may one day meet it, we cannot, at present, travel farther out of our record.

Since the decline of the bards, the preservation of these tales has chiefly devolved, both in the high and the low countries, upon its itinerant taylors and shoemakers ; and no doubt much of them is treasured up, and handed down, by the firesides where they are thus disseminated.

Over

Over all the Highlands, where there are almost no towns, and in many parts of the low countries where towns are distant, or where old customs are still kept up, partly on the idea of convenience, and partly on the idea that what is thus done at home is far superior to what they call market-work, of which they have a very mean opinion ;—as tradesmen are not very numerous, especially in the Highlands, as may be supposed from what we have said, their scarcity and usefulness give them a celebrity they would not otherwise obtain. Their visits are, generally, twice a-year to their employers, with occasional visits, as circumstances may require ; and the seasons of the two trades are kept distinct, partly that the family may not be incommoded, and partly that their amusements may be husbanded to the best advantage. It is a time of festivity, and almost jollity to the family, as well as to the tradesman
and

and his lads. Not only the comforting idea of new apparel, but the best things which can be afforded by the family, and in which all partake, are reserved for the tradesman : for, from scarcity, or from fashionable value, it is not always easy to get hold of him, and he must therefore be coaxed not a little. The amusements, about sunset, when the tradesman relaxes for a while from his toils, and enters into feats of strength and activity with the family; and his musical or historical talents, or even his news during the forenight, when all the family are convened round the fire, all conspire to render the tradesman's week a week of much social happiness.—He tells them what a glorious kingdom Scotland was, and how it is now sunk in obscurity by its marriages and unions; ascends to the chivalrous days of Wallace and the Bruce; and gradually involves himself deeper and deeper in the antiquities

ties of his country, and the heroic times of the Fingallians, till both he and his audience are completely bewildered. As an episode, he tells them that their progenitors in the low country, the Pecks, were once Scottishmen as well as the uncorrupted inhabitants of the mountains; but, departing from the hunting and the warrior state, they contaminated themselves, by becoming tillers of the ground.—Ploughs were unknown in these days; hence their operations, at first, were carried on by the pick or the mattock, as is done, in our own times, by the Highlander, who may think it worth his while to turn up a small patch or two for the sake of a few onions, (of which he is as fond as brother Welchman is of leeks) and of a few kail and potatoes. He said, with these tools, and with their strong hands, which they used as tools, they raised crops on lands which the lazy plough was obliged to

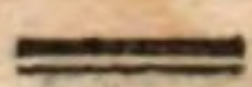
to abandon, (as is yet to be seen) and kinds of grain which the climate, or husbandry, at present hardly warrant. The labour, however, was great; but it diminished as they descended into the plain countries; and, as is usual, machinery was soon contrived to diminish labour. This first instrument of labour was called, in the Celtic, Peac, Peach, or Peachd; or it was spelled with io instead of ea, which makes scarcely any difference; and the people who used it, Peacich, Peachich, or Peac-tich. Hence, in Scotland, they are called Pechs, or Pechts; and the Peachd, or t, of the Gaelic, would easily run into the Picti of the Latin. I need not tell you, adds the tradesman, that, in the Gaelic, the ea is sounded nearly as ay, in way, and the ch like gh, in bought, thought, but strongly aspirated. He goes on, that the Pechs were very little men, but prodigiously numerous and stout, and their

arms and hands uncommonly long and strong, which indeed they used as tools in their various labours. All the ancient and stupendous structures, none, he said, were capable of erecting but they: for having dressed the stones in the quarry, they stood in one row or two between the quarry and the top of the scaffold, as the size and weight of the materials required, and handed them one to another as fast as they could be laid on the wall. Thus, though the Pichts had not all our tradesmen's regards, or in one of the countries, perhaps, had more, he was disposed, as Celtic brethren, to maintain as much of their dignity as he could, and even to consider the Pictish walls as raised by them to keep off the Britons and Romans, though he could not always bring this idea to chord with his other ideas of the Pictish and Scottish, or at once Scottish people, in their increasing strength and vigour.

gour. I shall not go farther with the tradesman's narrative, true and fabulous, contented to shew that the name of the Picts is not of a very remote date; that it is not their most ancient known name; that it was imposed upon them in contempt, as can almost be felt at this day; and that this opinion is supported by tradition, and the analysis of the language of the times.

One other part of our early history, as affording much groundless controversy, I shall advert to, and then conclude.

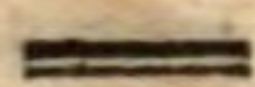
The first colony which the Scotti sent out crossed the *Æstuaries*, drove back the Britons, and seem to have obtained possession of the plain country along the sea coast, from the Clyde to the Solway. It appears that they were not only powerfully supported by their parent people,



but that some tribes from the north of Ireland partook in the new expedition.— This colony was called Meates, from the Celtic Magh and aiteach, the colony of the plain country. Afterwards another colony was sent out by the Scotti, the name of Picti not yet in use, but perhaps as an antidate, as we have noticed in Bede. These took possession of the remainder of the territories from the Forth to the Tyne, which being chiefly mountainous, the colony was called Attacotti, or Aitceah Cottaich, the colony of the hill country. It is probable that by this time the small Belgic colonies, or rather settlers, for they never came in force, were sat down along the eastern coasts, perhaps even north of the Forth, as well as southwards; and it is also probable that many of the Britons, though conquered, remained in their ancient establishments. This complete settlement of what has since been called the
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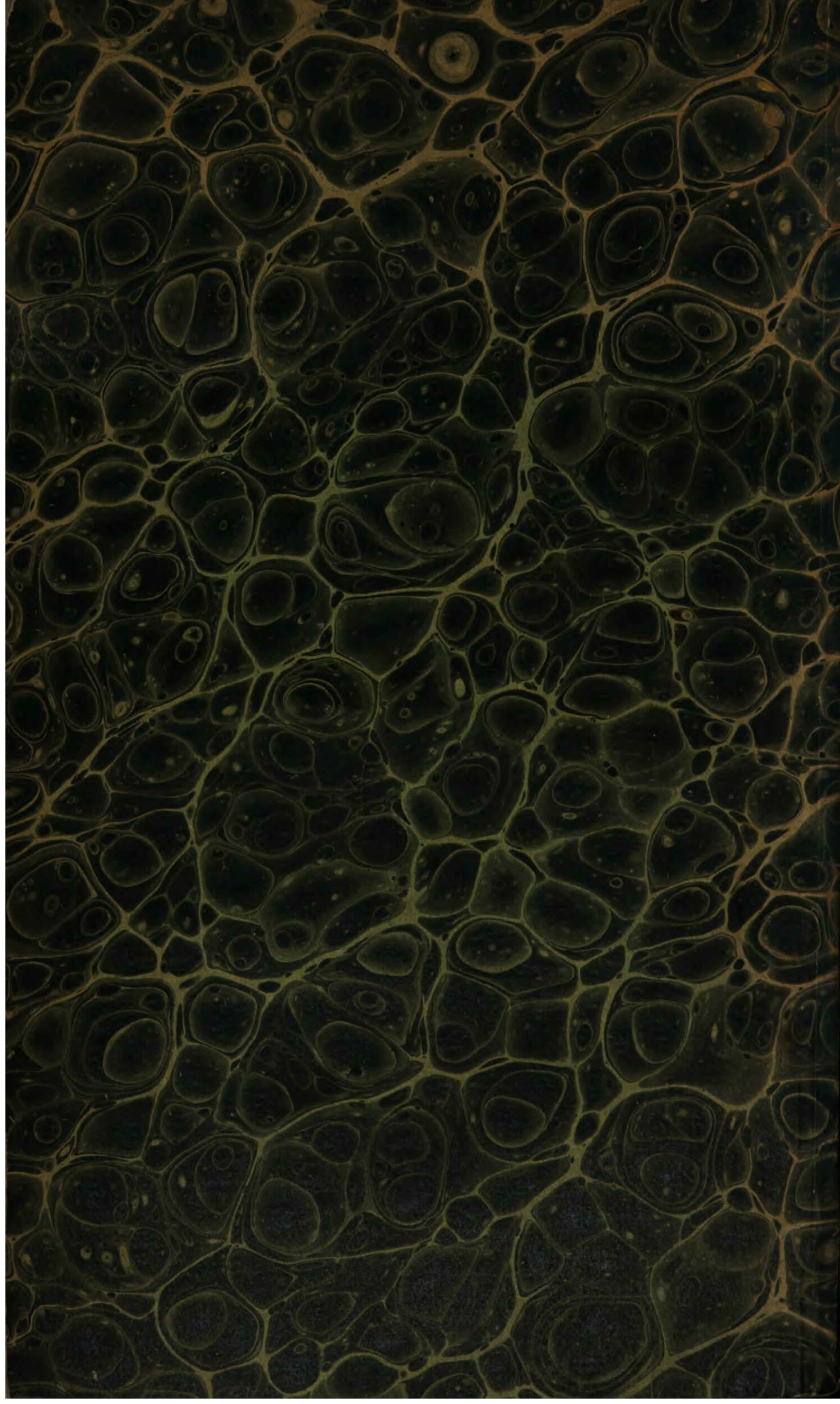
debateable lands, between the Roman walls, fully accounts for the vigorous resistance which the Romans met with there, in their progress northward; and the earliness of the settlement, according also with the Scottish history, is supported by the observation. This territory, like the territories of its people's ancestors, though sometimes overrun, was never subdued by the Romans. The Britons and Anglo-Saxons also made frequent and similar irruptions; but the people, under their own princes, generally maintained a kind of independence between their more powerful neighbours, till about the time of the overturning of the kingdom of the Picts, when they seem also to have fallen finally under the general dominion of the Scottish monarchy.

In this short, and, I may say, casual sketch, I hope I have, with all respect to
every



every author, thrown considerable light on the early and controverted periods of our history. I have rendered the high antiquity assumed by our oldest authors, (who undoubtedly had more to go upon than we now know of,) not only probable, but necessary; and the few links which I have drawn together, seem to be a fair outline of the history of the Celtic Scotti, from their arrival in the northern parts of Britain, till the Romans finally relinquished the island. The means I have taken for this purpose, to be sure, are new, but they appear to me to be uncontrovertible; and, I think, by prosecuting the idea, much additional light might still be acquired, both respecting our own history, and, as I have shewn, that of other nations.

THE END.



Couper, Robert

Notes and observations on the early part of the history of the British
Isles

Aberdeen 1807

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